



Montanans united for kids

MONTANA  
QUALITY EDUCATION  
COALITION

SENATE EDUCATION  
EXHIBIT NO. 14  
DATE 1-10-07  
BILL NO. SB 123

**TESTIMONY ON SB 123 – Sen. Carol Williams  
Senate Education and Cultural Resources  
January 10, 2007**

Chairman Ryan and members of the committee:

For the record, I am Pete Carparelli, Executive Director of the Montana Quality Education Coalition.

**I appear on behalf of MQEC and as a proponent of SB 123 sponsored by Senator Williams.**

As you know, the goal of the Montana Quality Education Coalition is adequate stable on-going funding for quality public K–12 education as defined in 20-9-309 MCA passed by the Montana Legislature in 2005 and as assured by the Montana Constitution. MQEC will evaluate legislation proposed during the 2007 Legislature, and will support such legislation that adequately addresses one or more of the requirements of 20-9-309 MCA and meets the state's constitutional obligation to adequately fund our public K–12 school system. It will also provide information to assist the Legislative and Executive branches in its considerations of proposed legislation dealing with Montana's public elementary and secondary schools.

MQEC honors the Court's recognition of the legislature's right to phase in any remedy over time, and MQEC will support legislation as part of a phase-in remedy that explicitly prescribes a cost-based approach and leads to a defined funding goal over a specified period of time.

MQEC will oppose legislation that is not consistent with 20-9-309 MCA and the Court's decision.

Today, MQEC supports passage of SB 123, "An Act Providing Full-Time Funding to Public School Districts for Students Enrolled in A Full-Time Kindergarten Program....." because it has determined that the bill addresses more than one of the tests of adequate funding and/or quality education. MQEC also supports passage of SB 123 because it is good public policy and good education – good for kids.

While MQEC supports SB 123, it retains concern for certain tests of adequacy which remain unmet in other statute, and which affect the ability of SB 123 to achieve its admirable goals. That concern is related to our contention that the value of the elementary ANB entitlement is neither cost-based nor adequate.

First and foremost, MQEC is about providing quality education to all of the children of Montana. Full-time kindergarten is quality educational practice. As you have already heard, the significant short and long-term benefits of full-time kindergarten are well documented in the literature of the Economics, Sociology and Education professions. I can tell you as a parent, grandparent, and former educator that I have directly observed the efficacy of kindergarten in children's learning and living – in school and beyond.

Second, MQEC believes that funding such sound best-practice as full-time kindergarten can be presented as a component of quality education that proactively addresses the problems of at-risk and other special needs populations as well as the challenge to eliminate the achievement gap evident amongst American Indian Children and children within the special needs population. It also sets a strong foundation for all students as they and we strive for a world-class competitive education and work force. Therefore, the full ANB funding of full-time kindergarten addresses some of the promises of the Montana Constitution and legislative intent as codified in 20-9-309, as well as more than one of the directives of the Courts. Passage of SB 123 would, thus, be good law.

SB 123 partially addresses the requirement that adequate funding of quality public K-12 schools be cost-based in that it does provide full-time ANB for full-time kindergarten students, as opposed to current law that provides only half of the funding for students attending full-time kindergarten. SB 123 also provides a means to adjust the general fund budget limitations for districts choosing to offer full-time kindergarten. To that extent, it would be good law. MQEC expresses strong concern, however, that unless adequate state funding to cover startup costs is appropriated through other legislation, the State would not be meeting its obligation to provide cost-based funding for full-time kindergarten. Without the startup funds, the goodness of the law is weakened.

SB 123 provides for a local option, making it good public policy and good law at the same time. As good law, it recognizes the statutorily established factor of local control of publicly funded schools. Locally elected school trustees may judge that in their particular situation they will provide enhanced early childhood education, or these locally elected trustees may choose, for whatever reason, to retain a more limited program. If the local citizenry disagrees with either approach, it could make its wishes known at the local level, and even exercise its democratic franchise to make a change in local policy and/or local school governance. Local control is good law and good public policy.

Chairman Ryan and members of the committee, MQEC suggests to you that although SB 123 does not in and of itself comprise adequate funding of free quality public K-12 schools, but along with cost corrections addressed elsewhere, it is a good step forward to that goal. It certainly is a strong step toward quality. We urge your "do pass" recommendation for this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. Thank you, Senator Williams for bringing SB 123 to the Legislature.